“काश धरती फट जाए और मैं उसमें समा जाऊं।

Today was Day 15.

Fifteen days since Prayag died.

In the corner of a one-room-kitchen house, a massive toy replica of a Jeep stands awkwardly, almost intrusively, claiming more space than the small room can afford. It feels out of proportion to everything else around it. There are no photographs of Prayag anywhere. Not on the walls, not tucked into corners, not even on a shelf. Only the Jeep remains—solid, visible, impossible to ignore. As if it has taken on the responsibility of remembering.

We are visiting Ramesh and Savitri. Prayag’s parents. Over the course of the hour that we spent with them, I ask Ramesh about the toy car.

“It was my babu’s favourite,” he says. “As long as he could, he would sit in it and ride.”

For a brief moment, something shifts in his face. A smile appears—unrehearsed, unguarded, almost surprised at itself. It carries the lightness of a different time. Then, just as quickly, it vanishes. Almost as if guilty that it showed up as joy. What remains is heavier. The kind of heaviness that seems to question whether even a fleeting moment of joy is permissible.

Ramesh has a round face, softened further now by fatigue. His head is shaved—part of the rituals that follow a son’s death. Fifteen months ago, he and Savitri had come from Bihar to Bangalore looking for treatment. Prayag was four then.

By October 2025, the direction was no longer uncertain. The tumor had already decided.

“Life has to go on,” he says.

He repeats it. Not to us, it seems, but to himself. Like something that must be said aloud in order to be believed, or at least endured. Almost as if he was counselling himself.

“We did everything we could think of. But God had other plans.”

The room falls into a silence that feels complete in itself. Not empty—just full in a way that does not require words. Interrupting it would feel like breaking something fragile. Unspeakable grief hangs heavily all around. My own tears are lurking. Threatening to break through.

In the kind of work we do, death is never abstract. It has signposts that other people can reference. Names, faces, favourite songs, pet peeves, half-finished plans.

It has school timetables and wedding anniversary dates.
It has the smell of a particular kitchen and the sound of a familiar laugh.
It has a toy car – now sitting silently. Bereft of its owner.

Every time it enters a home, it rearranges that world in ways that are felt for years. Sometimes for a life time.

We sit there for a while. And then it is time to leave.

“Life has to go on,” he says again, as we rise. It is not self-pity. It is a statement of fact.

A fact he grasps intellectually. But an emotion that will take forever to heal. And perhaps never.

“काश धरती फट जाए और मैं उसमें समा जाऊं। लेकिन मुझे दूसरों के लिए मजबूत रहना होगा।” (Every day, I wish the earth would open up and take me in. But I have to remain strong—for others).

I reach out to shake his hand, and then instinctually I draw him into a body hug. It is a long one.

I get into my car. Thankful that I am sitting in the front. I can finally let the tears trickle down.

In the hours after the visit, my mind keeps returning to that tiny home. I can see it clearly, down to the smallest details. But each time I return to it in memory, it feels a little different. The first heaviness gives way to something quieter—a clearer sense of how deeply lives can become intertwined, often without us fully noticing. It is like something unseen has gently – or harshly - shifted everything in place.

I sometime think the emotional and moral weight of the work we do can be overwhelming. And it is. And that it needs places to lay that weight down. But then again on days like this – I think our emotional weight pales in comparison to that of Ramesh and Savitri.

Each of us carries these emotions home in different ways. Some in words. Some in silence. Some in sleepless nights.

Some in the way we think about our own children. Our own parents. Our significant others. Or even ourselves. Perhaps – and hopefully – such days help us to look a little more closely and kindly and lovingly at them, at the end of a long day.

All names have been changed to protect identity.

@Saranam is a not-for-profit philanthropic institution working to create access to palliative and end of life care in public health institutions and space.

@Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology is a premier Regional Cancer Center in Bangalore. @Saranam works as an extension of the Department of Palliative Medicine to establish and deliver palliative home-care services across Greater Bangalore.

Prayag was under the combined care of Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology and Saranam’s palliative home care team. He was a little over five when he died, some days ago.

Ramesh is an Engineer. He left his job at a public sector company to care for his son full-time. He does not want to return to Bihar.

“I don’t have the strength,” he says, “to answer intrusive questions from family back home.”

He wants to stay in Bangalore. This city now holds what remains of their time with Prayag. He has been applying for jobs. Each application reaches the same point—the gap.

Eighteen months. To care for his only son.

Ramesh has worked as a Project Engineer, with experience in procurement processes, strategic sourcing, purchasing, price negotiation, inventory management, vendor management and evaluation, subcontracting procurement, and SAP MM integration.

If anyone in this network can help him find a suitable job, please reach out to me directly.